

Carl Paight



Coaching football was more than just a job for the late **Carl Paight**. It was a passion.

There was nowhere he wanted to be or enjoyed more than being on a football field coaching defense. And during a coaching career that spanned four decades, his 10 seasons as head coach at Norwalk High School from 1963–’72 were some of his favorite years on the gridiron.

It may also be where he had the most impact on his players, many of whom still talk glowingly of their former coach half a century after they played for him.

“Carl always took care of his athletes,” Phil Tegano, who started for Paight for three seasons from 1965–’67, said in a newspaper column after his former coach passed away in September 2012 at the age of 85. “He always watched over us. He was just a great, great guy.”

He was also a great defensive coach, a trait that followed Carl Paight his entire coaching career.

“Carl was a throwback,” Paul Krasnavage, an All-FCIAC first-team defensive lineman for Paight in 1970 and later an NHS head football coach himself, said. “He believed in hard-nosed football and playing tough defense. He would get his teams as tough as he could defensively and whatever happened on offense happened. He believed defense won games and he geared his teams toward that.”

“He always wanted his best athletes on defense,” Billy Howard, a defensive back who also played for Paight, agreed.

Regardless of Norwalk’s won-lost record every fall, the Green Wave, as they were known then, was often among the top defenses in the league.

“He always had a great defense,” Tegano, a defensive end, said.

One of Paight’s best defensive units was his 1967 team, which went 6–2–1, Norwalk High’s best record since the 1948 state championship team went 7–0–1. That ’67 team recorded three shutouts, allowed only one touchdown in two other games — including a 12–7 win over city rival Brien McMahon — and finished with the third best defense in the conference, yielding just 87 points, or just under 10 points a game.

“He was a defensive guru,” Howard, Paight’s senior captain and an All-FCIAC selection that season, said.

Tegano, another All-FCIAC pick from that team, agreed.

“He was just a genius on defense,” he said of his former coach. “He really knew how to defend an opposing team.”

That was evident three years later when Norwalk battled a heavily favored McMahon team in their annual showdown. The Senators came in with a 5–1 record and would go 8–1 that season, while NHS finished 2–5–2. But Paight drew up the perfect defensive game plan as his team battled its crosstown rival on even terms.

In fact, Norwalk’s defense technically pitched a shutout. A controversial safety provided the only scoring in McMahon’s 2–0 win.

“We usually played good defense, but we didn’t win because we didn’t score,” Krasnavage, who set a school record for unassisted tackles that season, said.

Howard (2007), Tegano (2009), and Krasnavage (2011) are all former Norwalk Old Timers honorees. This year they will be joined by their former coach.

After serving in the Coast Guard during WWII, Paight attended Southern Connecticut State College, where he was captain of the football team. After graduating, he began his football coaching career as an assistant at Masuk High School. Then when he began teaching at Norwalk High, he joined the coaching staff there as an assistant under Jack Cronin.

Paight was also the school’s head varsity basketball coach and in 1963 he and Cronin switched positions with Cronin taking over the basketball program and Paight landing the job he really wanted as a head football coach.

He would step down after the 1972 season, but continued to coach phys ed at NHS and coach the girls track team. Paight remained close to his favorite sport, however, by serving as a part-time assistant football coach at Western Connecticut State College, Fordham University and eventually Weston High School — all on the defensive side of the ball, of course.

When he retired from teaching, Paight became the director of the Weston Recreation Department in his hometown and he eventually moved to Florida, where he passed away six years ago. But his legacy continues through the Carl W. Paight Endowed Athletic Fund for Men and Women at Southern Connecticut State University.

That legacy also continues through the many lives he touched of his former Norwalk High School football players.